

Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Matthew Bryza

Press Conference

American Center at Azerbaijan University of Languages

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Deputy Assistant Secretary Bryza: Thank you all for coming on this beautiful summer day to spend a few minutes with me as I bid you farewell. I'm deeply grateful for all the times we've worked together; you've worked with me to clarify if something I said seemed not to make sense. I'm grateful for the respect that you've shown me personally as well as my country and the Minsk Group Process. Through your professional coverage of all of these diplomatic efforts, you help us all to achieve, I think, goals that we clearly all share in terms of regional peace, prosperity and stability.

I anticipate you will enjoy working with my successor as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, that's Ambassador Tina Kaidanow. She has tremendous experience. She preceded me at the White House a few years ago, and now I guess I precede her in this job.

As far as my successor as the Minsk Group Co-chair is concerned, we're still also working through that issue. I don't have any further details now, and I would recommend if you have further questions about that to reach out to Washington.

Finally, I would say that I leave this job feeling quite comfortable about where U.S.-Azerbaijani relations are. I think we've strengthened them. We've got work to do still in certain areas, but I think we have strong positive momentum in our relationship.

Our countries are friends, they are partners, and they operate on the basis of three sets of shared interests. We have strong shared security interests, which includes our commitment to a peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, as well as our strong cooperation on counterterrorism. We have strong shared interests as well in the field of energy, where Azerbaijan is emerging as one of the key potential alternative suppliers for Europe to diversify its own supplies of natural gas. And we have strong shared interest in Azerbaijan's continued transformation through political and economic reform. In all of these areas there's much more work to do. I'm not here to lecture on any specific topic, but to say in any country that's transforming or that's already an established democracy there's always much to do to strengthen domestic institutions.

Finally, I'd just like to say that we are moving ahead in all three sets of interests, but they all must be moving together over time to achieve our goals in any one of those sets of interests.

I'd be pleased and honored to take your questions about any topic. Thank you again.

Question: The first question was about the opinion of the U.S. President, does the U.S. President share your point of view that seven regions should be returned to Azerbaijan? Also the second part of the question was about the activities of Russian Federation as well as the United States of America, so we know the American role wasn't as positive, or America wasn't as good as it was said in the Kosovo conflict, as well as the Russian Federation did not really show well in [inaudible].

Bryza: On the first question, the issue of President Obama's views on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement, well, you know what they are. If you read the information sheet that was released with the joint statement he made with Presidents Sarkozy and Medvedev on July 10th. There you see the fundamental elements of the basic principles for the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement that we, the co-chairs, have been negotiating now for these past few years on behalf of the OSCE and our own governments.

President Obama is our only boss, so it would be extremely unwise and unauthorized for me to advocate any policies with which he disagrees. And I am so honored, by the way, to have been able to spend the first six months of the Obama Administration in this same job, which gave me a chance to work with you for another half a year.

When it comes to peacekeeping operations, Russia in the South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions of Georgia or the United States, first of all I don't think there's much utility in examining or debating their relative effectiveness or lack of effectiveness.

The peacekeepers, as we foresee for the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement, will not be the sole guarantee of a settlement. If the agreement is to be lasting, it has to be strong enough internally to satisfy the fundamental interests of all the parties with a wide variety of elements, not just peacekeepers. And I am convinced that what we have proposed in Madrid and what we have updated slightly in Krakow a couple of weeks ago provides just such a proposal for a settlement. That is strong enough internally to maintain the peace because the agreement will be seen as fair to all parties. Thank you.

Question: The question is if you had an opportunity to talk about the youth bloggers, as well the closure of the radio stations at your meeting with Azerbaijani President.

Bryza: Yes, I did get a chance to discuss the cases of Mr. Milli and Mr. Hajizadeh. In fact I raised that issue on my own in meeting with President Aliyev today. I was also able to discuss the case with several different leaders of civil society, including youth groups and those who work on media freedom issues. As we said before, we think it's essential that this case be resolved in full accordance with due process to, of course, uphold the fundamental rights of Azerbaijan's citizens and sustain or advance media freedom, and thereby strengthen Azerbaijan internally.

When it comes to Radio Liberty and the BBC and Voice of America and the other international radio stations, in the case of the American ones we are awaiting the response of the government of Azerbaijan to the proposal of the Broadcasting Board of Governors who are the ones that operate and are associated with both the VOA and Radio Liberty.

Question: When can we expect the next OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs visit to Azerbaijan?

Bryza: I guess you probably want to ask the co-chairs, but I hope that's going to happen sometime in ... well I hope Ambassador Fastier will visit in early September and perhaps the co-chairs will come in mid to late September, but I'm actually not certain. But for now the, first Ambassadors Fassier and Merzlyakov are enjoying their holidays.

Question: There's some kind of mindset in Azerbaijan because Azerbaijan thinking that regardless of the personalities of the co-chairs that there are certain policies of France, Russian Federation and the United States of America. However, can you tell us if there's room for the diplomat, for the co-chair to maneuver in spite of the certain policy led by the state, and can you tell us if you had that kind of room for maneuver by being a professional diplomat.

Also, you've been working for the past year as the U.S. co-chair in the Minsk Group since 2005. What will be your evaluation of the progress made from that?

Bryza: First of all I would state that the individual diplomat has, at least from the United States, a lot of room for maneuver. In my case it was quite significant because I was responsible not only for our efforts in the Minsk Group but also for our overall policy toward South Caucasus as well as Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, and energy in Europe.

So I certainly did not feel that some distant or impersonal machine was telling me what U.S. policy is and then I had to operate according to a very narrow channel to implement that policy, because I was right in the middle of our effort to formulate the overall policy. I'm partially responsible for that policy.

When it comes to my Russian colleague, I can say, well, I don't know how his interaction with the overall Russian policymaking was conducted, but he throughout every meeting we ever had, every discussion, every bit of travel, was always constructive and pushing as creatively as he could to help bring the parties together and to agree.

Of course I can say the same for my French counterpart.

From my perspective, the way we conducted these negotiations was free of any sort of domestic political considerations whatsoever. We were fair to all parties and we were tough on all parties. We encouraged them to be reasonable and constructive at every turn. We didn't pressure them, because that's not appropriate. We're mediators. But we encouraged them, and we used a remarkable degree of creativity as a unified team to help the parties move forward in a dramatic way, I would even say, over the course of the last three years.

So the Minsk Group has helped the two Presidents come very close to a breakthrough that will allow them to finalize a Framework Agreement for a lasting peace settlement, and of that I'm indeed proud and grateful to my colleagues for their teamwork and their constructiveness and their creativity. And it was the individuals, maybe present company excluded, who really did make a difference. There's no way to reach an agreement if there isn't a high degree of creativity and individual trust between human beings.

Question: The first question is don't you think that the replacement of the U.S. co-chair at this critical time could be harmful to the peace process?

The second part of the question, the media just announced that Matt Bryza will be the next U.S. Ambassador to Azerbaijan?

Bryza: Thank you for both questions, which flatter me. Even though I just spent a few minutes explaining that the co-chairs' individual efforts are quite important and have an impact on the negotiations, I sense that the Minsk Group process finds itself in a very good place right now. While I cannot say who it will be, I know that the replacement of the current Minsk Group Co-chair will be someone of the highest caliber with tremendous diplomatic experience and significant knowledge of this fantastic region.

I think the parties will be quite pleased. Because the Obama Administration looks at this region, this country, and your neighboring country, but this country here, Azerbaijan, as of great importance to us in terms of our strategic objectives and our fundamental values. We've seen the personal involvement of President Obama and Secretary Clinton in these various issues we're discussing today. We just had a visit of our Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg, and we've had two visits by our Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Eurasia, Phil Gordon, just in the course of a few weeks. In fact, as Assistant Secretary Gordon said during his testimony before the United States Senate just about a week and a half ago, he spends more of his time on the Caucasus security issues than any other issue.

So the top levels of our U.S. administration will continue to pay not only close attention but remain actively involved in continuing these processes and will appoint the right people to do so.

As far as my own future is concerned, I have nothing new to add today. As I've said many times, I hope to remain connected to the South Caucasus for as long as I can see into the future. And with this, I guess my last official act in this position, I can tell you I already miss you. And I'm so looking forward to beginning my vacation in about 12 seconds.

So thank you for everything and I look forward to being in contact with you for many many years.

[Applause.]

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